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Rev. Black Visits Southeast Conference

February 5th through February 7th, newly elected General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ, Geoffrey Black, toured the Southeast Conference as he conducted the sixth of ten listening sessions across the United Church of Christ. During these listening sessions, he has looked forward to hearing the hopes and visions of UCC members for our beloved church. While in the Southeast Conference Rev. Black, spoke with members of 13 Southeast Conference congregations and new church starts, meeting with over 200 people in 4 listening sessions, and speaking in worship with Victory Church, UCC, Stone Mountain, and First Congregational UCC, Atlanta.

Click to see slideshow!

On Friday the 5th, Rev. Black toured Uplands Retirement Village including the new Wharton Nursing Home. Following the tour, he met with over 100 members of Pleasant Hill Community UCC, and United Church, Cookeville, UCC over a potluck supper. He reminded the gathering that the United Church of Christ is a leader among denominations, and a witness to justice, peace, ecumenism, and inclusiveness. While we are in challenging times, he noted that we have a rich future before us. Some of the visions for the UCC that were shared by the gathering were that the UCC would:

- "Go into the world with love"
- Engage environmental priorities
- Promote participatory democracy.
- Stand up against violence and pornography
- Affirm that we are a people of "evangelical courage"
- Enter the world as peace makers

On Saturday over lunch, 23 TAP participants gathered from Atlanta, Stone Mountain, Chattanooga, Savannah and Birmingham. Rev. Black's opening comments reminded us that we are in a period of rapid change. We have been a denomination of "firsts" in this nation's history. We have been leaders in abolitionism, the rights of women, labor, civil rights, and the rights of LGBT people. Each of these moments of advocacy has been transformational in the history of the United States.

Visions that were shared with Rev. Black from the floor included a concern that we are not well known, we have a problem with "branding", and we need to share the good news of the still speaking God. We need to be passionate about our church and our values, and not let others define us. One participant noted, "We need to be Christly rather than trying to explain Christ". Audri Williams a member of Victory Church, Stone Mountain noted in a reflection on the event that we should be a people of "moral imagination" and that the dialogue with Rev. Black "awakening a sense of our capacity to imagine something rooted in the challenges of the real world."

That evening, meeting with pastors and lay leaders involved in new church starts, those who gathered were invited to give one word that described their experience with new church starts in the UCC. Those words included; "sincerity" "expansive", "liberating", "awesome", "home", and "miracle". The stories of two of the new churches

were shared with Rev. Black. One participant noted, "We are literally saving lives" by our ministries. Another noted that in the emerging models of new church development the lay leadership is every bit as important as the pastoral leadership. Rev. Black noted that this is a challenging season for doing new church development, and the UCC has not had a history of doing them well, but with the organization of the Center for Progressive Renewal, he hopes that we can improve new church development.

On Sunday, the tour continued with Rev. Black bringing greetings to over 1,000 worshippers gathered for the early service at Victory Church, and preached to over 200 at First Congregational UCC, Atlanta on the theme "A Sacred Challenge…A Faithful Response". From there, he was welcomed at a lunch with some of the leadership of Central Congregational UCC.
At 2:00, over 50 people gathered for a final listening session. Visions that were shared for the United Church of Christ included the hope that we would truly be a denomination where all were welcomed. Another respondent asked that we take being a just peace denomination seriously. Another offered up a vision of having a multitude of Spanish speaking ONA UCC churches across the denomination. One person invited us to dream of becoming a "theological NPR", fostering thoughtful theological conversations. Other visions engaged the hopes for greater diversity in the pews of churches, more youth, and vibrant worship.

Click here to read comments by a TAP member who attended the luncheon with Rev. Geoffrey Black.

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S	M	T	W	T	F	S
30	31	1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
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